

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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September 11, 2023

SENT VIA EMAIL AND U.S. MAIL:

Ryan.Walters@sde.ok.gov

Ryan Walters
State Superintendent of Public Instruction
State Department of Education
2500 N. Lincoln Blvd.
Oklahoma City, OK 73105

Re: Oklahoma's Partnership with PragerU Kids

Dear Superintendent Walters:

We are writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) to object to your recent decision to partner with PragerU Kids to teach its dubious curriculum in Oklahoma schools. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with more than 40,000 members across the country, including hundreds of members in Oklahoma. FFRF works to protect the constitutional separation between state and church and educates about nontheism.

In a video you released announcing this partnership, you noted that you could “not be more excited to get this content in our classrooms, to get this understanding of American history, without any indoctrination but actually the facts of what happened, so the kids can know the principles this country was founded on.”¹ To be clear, this content belongs nowhere near a public school classroom. The videos that are used as a part of this curriculum are nothing more than YouTube-type videos that spew propaganda and misleading, or outright incorrect, information.

Your statement is a classic example of projection as you continue to push your personal religious agenda while decrying so-called “indoctrination” from your public pulpit. All the while, you insist on teaching children of Oklahoma revisionist history that fits your narrative. Dennis Prager, the founder of PragerU and PragerU Kids, even admitted that PragerU’s ideologically driven propaganda videos are a form of

¹ www.prageru.com/prageru-kids-is-partnering-with-oklahoma.

“indoctrination.”² The sad reality is that you reject factual, evidence-based teaching and endorse PragerU’s indoctrination. It is important to note for the record that “PragerU” is not a university or academic institution, does not confer degrees, was founded by a conservative radio talk show host, and deceitfully uses a name that implies otherwise. It is little more than a glorified YouTube Channel lacking academic credentials. It spreads anti-Muslim rhetoric and conspiracy theories and its declared purpose is to promote “Judeo-Christian values.”³ It is shameful that PragerU [offers a video](#) providing misinformation on the separation between state and church, delivered by disgraced former law professor John Eastman, who was [recently featured as “Co-Conspirator No. 2”](#) in Donald Trump’s indictment for attempting to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election.

Pushing the PragerU propaganda is a logical next step in your unabashed attempt to privatize education in Oklahoma, and destroy the state’s system of secular public education. Despite your title of Superintendent of *Public* Instruction, you continue to do a disservice to the public school students you are supposed to serve. Bringing PragerU propaganda into classrooms across the state is, sadly, directly in line with your record of undermining the public education system.

One need not look far for a public record of your revisionist history, either. You have erroneously mentioned that “Our Founders believed in a godly nation. In recent history, we’ve drastically changed the Founders’ hopes and beliefs in a nation under God.”⁴ This is a demonstrably false claim, primarily because the Founders notably adopted the first secular constitution in history, granting sovereignty to “We the People,” not a deity, barring any religious test for public office and adopting the Bill of Rights with its essential Establishment Clause barring government establishment of religion. Apparently, you are alluding to the motto “In God We Trust” and ignoring the nation’s original motto, chosen by Franklin, Jefferson and Adams, “E Pluribus Unum” (Out of many, one). “In God We Trust” is a johnny-come-lately motto adopted only in 1956 at the height of the Cold War. Americans who value the benefits of public education free from actual indoctrination know that a key to effective learning is a classroom experience that encourages critical thinking and relies on academically vetted instruction approved by objectively decreed educators, rather than on Christian nationalist opinion.

² www.vanityfair.com/news/2023/08/prageru-coming-to-a-public-school-near-you.

³ Factsheet: PragerU, Georgetown University, March 17, 2020: bridge.georgetown.edu/research/factsheet-prageru/.

⁴ tulsaworld.com/opinion/column/state-superintendent-ryan-walters-oklahoma-welcomes-religious-charter-schools/article_a85b8cb4-0fca-11ee-9133-9fde228d1367.html.

PragerU, by the admission of its founder, runs counter to those principles. It is an ideologically motivated propaganda machine that does not belong in classrooms. We urge the Board of Education to quash this egregious partnership between Oklahoma public schools and PragerU to ensure that Oklahoma students are indeed educated, not indoctrinated.

Very truly,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Annie Laurie Gaylor Dan Barker". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Annie Laurie Gaylor & Dan Barker

Co-Presidents

ALG/DB:rh

Cc: Members of the State Board of Education